From: John Dean
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/15/02 3:29pm
Subject: Microsoft Settlement

My name is John Holmes Dean III and I am a 25 year old computer engineer. I have been programming since I was ten on a wide variety of computers; Apple IIe, Commodore Amiga, Macintoshes and IBM-PCs. The purpose of this letter is to highlight the technical inefficiencies of early Microsoft software and come to the conclusion that given a level playing field, no informed consumer would pick Microsoft's products based on quality. I will then talk about the time that Microsoft took over one hundred dollars from me in exchange for nothing in a move that stifled competition in a education setting (similar to the settlement Microsoft has currently proposed).

Between the years of 1987 and 1996, I was an active user and programmer of Commodore Amigas. The Amiga, which never achieved more than a low single-digit market share, occupies an interesting niche in computer history. Released in 1985 (one year after the ubiquitous Macintosh) to great fanfare, the Amiga was the first true "multimedia" computer. At a time when PCs had EGA (16 colors) and Macintoshes were black & white, the Amiga was capable of 4096 colors on screen. The Amiga had 4 channel 8-bit digital stereo sound when the PC had internal speakers and the Macintosh had 1 channel. The Commodore Amiga shipped with Workbench 1.0 which was a pre-emptive multitasking, graphical user interface operating system.

I spent my teenage years engrossed with my Amiga. Because Workbench could do pre-emptive multitasking (a form of running multiple programs where the operating system gives and takes processor time away from the individual programs), I would commonly use my computer to download files over my modem, listen to digital music files and play games at the same time. During this time, Microsoft's flagship operating system was Windows 3.X. Windows 3.X used a form of multitasking called cooperative multitasking. Each program had the responsibility to relinquish control of the processor to the next program. Cooperative multitasking is the same form of multitasking used on Macintoshes before Mac OS X and is considered an inferior method. It was hard to impossible to get multiple program to run correctly at the same time on early version of windows. When it was possible, the systems requirements were far greater. Windows 95 had a limited form of pre-emptive multitasking that was a mix between pre-emptive and cooperative. Windows uses a single letter for drive names. Windows uses the 8.3 naming convention. Windows, to this day, can not really name a file more than 8 letters long. "Long" file names are stored in the "information" field, which no longer exists, obviously. Windows 3.X involved 3 steps to make a disk or CD-ROM appear on the screen, whereas you only had to stick the disk in on the Amiga/Macintosh to have it appear on the screen. Windows 95 and greater still requires one step because after you insert a floppy or CD-ROM, you must still double-click on 'My Computer' to see it. 'Plug-n-Pray' is a term used to describe Microsoft's 'Plug-n-Play' system. The DOS command line was inferior to Workbench's CLI (Workbench had a command line as well) because you couldn't copy and paste. there was no history and no command pipe. I can nit-pick forever when it comes to Windows, however I will admit that most of Window's problems are related to its MS-DOS ancestry and the many, many shortcomings of the IBM-PC architecture.

My other hobby was being a "troll." In internet terminology, a troll posts highly controversial statements to illicit as much feedback as possible (called "feeding the troll"). The term troll had not yet been invented, but I took great pleasure in posting messages to IBM-PC and Microsoft electronic bulletin board systems explaining how inferior IBM-PCs and Microsoft Windows really was. I would of course receive tens if not hundreds of responses, all of which I would respond to-- beginning debates which

would last for years. I convinced no less than a dozen people of the truth, all of which purchased Amigas and some of which are still life-long friends.

To this day, I have not purchased Microsoft software with one exception. When I was earning my Electrical Engineering degree at the University of Texas, Microsoft signed a deal with the University to provide copies of Microsoft software at $5 a CD. The cost to the university was 100 million dollars which was added to each student's "Computer Fees." In that respect, Microsoft stole nearly $25 a semester from me for five semesters so that I could have the honor of buying Microsoft software for $5 a CD. I hated and despised this move by Microsoft because Microsoft knew that this was the only way to get a college student like me to pay for their software in the first place. Furthermore, because students could get Microsoft Visual Studio for $25 (5 CDs) all programming classes began using Visual Studio because other compilers such as Borland and Metrowerks (where I can currently employed) could no longer compete, even with student pricing. I watched the programming classes at UT go from Metrowerks only to Visual Studio only in the course of two years.

Microsoft's settlement will allow Microsoft to achieve the same goal in the secondary and high school education market. By giving out Microsoft software for free, students will learn and become accustomed to Microsoft software and not made aware of the alternatives. The proposed Microsoft settlement amounts to nothing more than an exclusive advertisement contract between education and Microsoft.

In conclusion, I have personally seen the negative effects of Microsoft and IBM-PCs on the computer market. Microsoft took ten years to produce a product that (almost) met the capabilities of Workbench. Furthermore, Microsoft signed a deal that forced me to give them money just to continue my education. I now work for a Microsoft competitor where I will do my part to bring the giant down. I hope the Department of Justice does theirs.

John Holmes Dean III